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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000126

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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR URGES IRAQI LEADERS TO STEP UP AFTER
PRESIDENT BUSH'S SPEECH

Classified By: Ambassador Khalilzad, reasons 1.4 (b) and
(d).

¶1. (C) Summary: On the morning of January 11, the Ambassador met seriatim with Iraq's parliament (Council of Representatives - CoR) Speaker Mashadani (Sunni), and Vice Presidents Hashemi (Sunni) and al-Mehdi (Shiite) to highlight key aspects of President Bush's speech, urge public statements in support for PM Maliki's Baghdad security plan, and encourage them to move forward with key political benchmarks. The Ambassador singled out the need for legislation on hydrocarbons, provincial elections and de-Ba'athification, the Constitution, and for a timeline for action. The Ambassador noted that the U.S. will be taking action to counter negative Iranian and Syrian influences.
End Summary.

The Ambassador's Message

¶2. (C) The Ambassador told Speaker Mashadani and VPs Hashemi and al-Mehdi, all of whom had read the President's speech, that Iraqi action is central to the success of the new Iraq strategy. Iraq's leaders should not miscalculate: the U.S. Congress and public will not understand the commitment of American lives and resources if Iraqis do not act, and this would lead to a very serious recalibration of U.S. policy. He urged all three to rise above sectarian concerns and exercise leadership.

¶3. (C) The Ambassador singled out legislation on hydrocarbons, provincial elections, the Constitution, and de-Ba'athification reform as priority items. The Ambassador urged each to immediately publicly support principles enunciated by PM Maliki for the new Baghdad security plan: no distinction with regard to sect in operations; no sanctuary anywhere in Baghdad for killers and other lawbreakers; no political interference in security operations.

¶4. (C) The Ambassador also urged each to move to consolidate moderate political forces in support of political and security goals.

Speaker Mashadani

¶5. (C) The Ambassador urged Speaker Mashadani's to use his broad powers in the CoR. Mashadani expressed concern that the Baghdad security plan to would start in Sunni areas; the Ambassador said it would be pushed in all areas. Mashadani said he had publicly supported the new plan on January 10 in the CoR; the Ambassador urged Mashadani to issue another public statement to follow up on the President's speech,

which occurred in the early morning hours of January 11 in Baghdad. Mashadani said that hopefully he would convoke a press conference within the next day.

¶16. (C) Mashadani, with the President's speech playing on Arabic-language television in his office, said "we have no alternative" but to support the new strategy. He claimed that he had been speaking with Syrian officials who assured him that Syria would be supportive of the GOI. The Ambassador said that the U.S. is looking for concrete actions from Syria, and noted that Syria and the GOI had been unable to conclude the security agreement Syria promised to make.

¶17. (C) The Ambassador noted that the CoR was consistently failing to reach quorum. Mashadani blamed the Shiite Sadrists boycott, the Sunni Hewar bloc, the cross-sectarian secular Iraqiyya bloc, and delays at checkpoints. (Note: Mashadani's Tawafuq bloc also has a spotty attendance record. End Note.)

¶18. (C) Mashadani said that if moderate elements from the PM's Shiite Dawa, SCIRI parties, the Iraqi Islamic Party and Kurds united, he would form the rest of the parties into a "loyal opposition." The Ambassador urged him instead to gather CoR bloc leaders on the key legislative issues, and come to a timeline for legislative action.

VP Hashemi

¶19. (C) VP Hashemi promised he would urge Tawafuq bloc legislators to attend the CoR and find out who had been failing to attend. Hashemi was optimistic about the prospects for agreement on a hydrocarbons law but doubted that High National De-Ba'athification Commission chairman

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Chalabi was serious about reform; the Ambassador pointed out that Sunni members of the Commission were failing even to appear at hearings.

¶10. (C) Hashemi told the Ambassador the PM had not given him a written copy of the new Baghdad security plan but had only briefed it to him orally. Hashemi complained that the PM did not consult with him or even with Shiite VP al-Mehdi on key decisions. He said that if the PM has a problem with him, he would be willing to work through an intermediary or even resign to make room for someone with whom the PM could work.

VP al-Mehdi

¶11. (C) VP al-Mehdi told the Ambassador that SCIRI bloc leader al-Hakim had briefed Ayatollah Sistani. He urged that the U.S. consider expanding the International Zone as a sign of improved Baghdad security. However, al-Mehdi acknowledged that it would take time to see results from the new security plan.

¶12. (C) The Ambassador noted that PM Maliki had put al-Mehdi in charge of the political aspects of the new plan. Al-Mehdi complained that the PM had only told him "a few sentences" about what his role is to be. The Ambassador suggested that al-Mehdi meet with the PM to flesh out the details of his role.

KHALILZAD